

# Introduction to the Symposium on the Prehistory of Japan

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MORGAN TAMPLIN

THE SYMPOSIUM on the Prehistory of Japan, held at Trent University, Peterborough, Canada, January 18–20, 1975, was supported by direct grants from The Canada Council and from the National Museum of Man, Ottawa. Publication of the papers was aided by a grant from the President's Academic Endowment Fund, Trent University.

This symposium, like many such conferences, had its beginnings in a happy combination of coincidences, although its successful conclusion, attested to by these collected papers, is the result of much hard work on the part of all the participants. It is my intention to summarize the background to the symposium and give recognition to those persons who contributed to its success.

In the fall of 1973, a special series of lectures on Chinese culture was held to mark the opening of Trent University's newest college—Otonabee. One of the lecturers, Dr. Peter Swann, suggested a follow-up series on Japan. The college Master, Robert Carter, and the Otonabee Academic Committee began planning in the winter of 1974, beginning with an initial approach to the Japanese Ambassador to Canada, His Excellency Akira Hishiyama.

With the Ambassador's immediate and enthusiastic support for the series, Professor Carter was able to approach a number of Japanese corporations for financial support. By the summer of 1975, a number of companies, headed by Toyota, had offered assistance, and the active participation of the Japanese Consulate and Cultural Centre in Toronto was also assured. Lectures on the history, art, economics, labor-management, religion, and music of Japan were scheduled, as well as films, demonstrations, and exhibits.

As the only archaeologist on the college academic committee, I felt that Japanese prehistory had been overlooked, and suggested bringing a few archaeologists to

Morgan Tamplin is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario.

Trent to rectify the oversight. With the committee's approval, I put the idea to Bill Hurley at the University of Toronto, offering to handle the local arrangements if he would organize the program.

With characteristic energy and enthusiasm Bill began to set events into motion, mostly from the field in Hokkaido. On returning from my own fieldwork in Africa I discovered that we were about to embark on an international conference with Canadian, American, and Japanese participants, and that we should find immediate funding to do so. I also learned to my surprise that many North American archaeologists actively working in Japanese prehistory were at Canadian institutions. Plans for the conference touched a nerve; it seemed that everyone's research had reached the point where communication with others was essential.

The Department of Anthropology at Trent applied for and received a conference grant from The Canada Council. One of the requirements of such a grant is that the host institution assume a portion of the expenses. This was fulfilled by Otonabee's commitment to a portion of the accommodation, as well as a grant of \$500 from Trent's Academic Endowment Fund, which was applied to the publication costs of the proceedings.

As the date of the conference approached and total funding became uncertain, the National Museum of Man in Ottawa was approached and on incredibly short notice agreed to fund Dr. Chosuke Serizawa's visit as part of their distinguished visiting scholars program. This grant enabled Dr. Serizawa to attend not only our conference, but also other specially arranged symposia at Montreal; Toronto; Vancouver; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Hawaii.

The participants began to arrive on the Friday evening of January 17, in time to hear a concert and demonstration of Noh music. Sessions were arranged chronologically over the next three days, from Palaeolithic through Jōmon to Yayoi. Technical papers on microblade manufacturing techniques and linguistics were also presented. Everything was arranged as informally as possible in a workshop-like atmosphere, with even more informal social sessions in the evenings! Although the three days were mainly devoted to specialist presentations, interested students were encouraged to attend. On the final evening, some of the participants presented to the public general papers on Japanese prehistory—a most unusual conclusion to a symposium of this sort.

In our final report to the Canada Council we summarized the results of the conference as follows:

Apart from the tangible results to which this publication attests, we may say that our previous contentions that the conference would bring about the cross-fertilization of ideas were completely justified. There is an increased tempo of activity by North American archaeologists interested in the problems of Japanese prehistory, many of whom are at Canadian institutions. All participants and other workers in the field agreed that the conference represented the right action at the right time. A great many problems of interpretation were indeed resolved. . . .

We felt at the time that the conference was a complete success and the published results confirm that impression.